



The Processes of Recruitment and Selection of Personnel: Between Objectivity and Subjectivity

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Abstract

This study is the result of reflecting on the importance of the processes of attracting human talent in organizations, in order to consider the relevance of social representations in hiring decisions. The research is qualitative, descriptive and documentary; The method of hermeneutics is used, and as a technique the collection and analysis of written information. The various resources to support the choice of candidates for a position - widely known - are discussed since, even so, some companies lack personnel to fit the profile of the position; There may be nepotism in hiring, discrimination and even hidden policies that, rather than looking for the profile, are based on physical appearance, among other factors, in addition to the subjectivity attributable to the recruiter himself. It is essential to understand the needs of companies and workers, based on techniques that do not seek to objectively explain reality.

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1. Introduction

The outcome of the recruitment and selection processes is so uncertain and variable that many of us have come to question its reliability. However, it cannot go unnoticed that there are techniques designed to support companies seeking to fill a vacancy and, it is noteworthy, that in the literature there is research aimed at analyzing the variables that influence the recruitment and selection processes, but, since these processes are carried out by human resources personnel -in the best of cases-, subjectivity prevails in the choice of applicants for a job.

It is necessary to encourage discussion around the hiring of personnel in organizations because the stability of families, the future of graduates and the development of professionals depend on that, which makes it necessary to review what is considered as the norm in the recruitment manuals and personnel selection. Therefore, below, some of the most common human resources processes in companies that, sooner or later, all workers have to go through are reviewed and, likewise, there is the need to include other theoretical-methodological proposals, such as that of social representations in the recruitment and selection of personnel.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

In the company environment, the selection of personnel is, -or should be-, a fundamental part of the production processes, since the characteristics of the human resources that an organization has have an influence on the results it obtains (Gutiérrez, 2007). However, despite the fact that a principle of capitalist society is meritocracy, that is, job evaluation according to personal achievements and effort, favoritism and nepotism are common hiring criteria (Gómez, González, & Forero, 2007). To avoid the latter and ensure relevant hiring, it is common for companies to base their recruitment on job competencies, basing their selection procedures on interviews, psychometric and psychological tests, review of the curriculum vitae and verification of references, among others, all based on the previous analysis of the job position (López, 2010).

Another factor that affects the personnel selection processes, according to Solano-Gómez and Smith-Castro (2017), is that of stereotypes, since they are cognitive structures that allow human beings to organize and simplify the social environment and thereby understand the world around them. Continuing with this analysis, the authors concluded that stereotypes “influence human perception, evaluation, affects and behaviors, not only in intergroup contexts but also in interpersonal and work contexts” (Solano-Gómez & Smith-Castro, 2017) which suggests that “subjective” elements play a role within the recruitment processes. From this perspective, it is to be assumed that, in the case of professional selection, the outcome of the processes could also be influenced by the social representations that are developed both in universities and in public and private companies. On the other hand, for the students, both their expectations and limitations as well as the conception of what the labor insertion implies, could impact on the result of their employability since, for the recruiters, the beliefs around higher education institutions, public and private, could be the cause of a professional bias far from an impartial personnel selection process. In accordance with the above, Ruiz Larraguivel. (2004) mentions the role played by the mission and purposes of a technological university in social stratification, and concludes that the training offered by this university influences the possibilities of career advancement of its graduates, given the profile of the young people who decide to study there. In turn, in another study, Ruiz Larraguivel (2009) concluded that the training received by a group of engineers at the university influenced their professional employment and career advancement, since there is the tendency of employers to value more the work performance of engineers graduated from private institutions (Ruiz Larraguivel, 2009).

Also, as mentioned by Solano-Gómez and Smith-Castro (2017), it is possible to find studies in the literature that gather evidence to affirm that the physical attractiveness of applicants for a job influences the result of their selection. In addition to sex, which favors men over women, factors that can be part, as mentioned before, of hidden policies shared in the company, or correspond exclusively to the subjectivity of the person who hires.

1.2. Recruitment and Selection by Competencies

Recruitment refers to the activities carried out to attract qualified people, according to a human resources plan, while personnel selection consists of the procedure to choose those most suitable to fill a position (Dolan & Raich, 2010; Polanco, 2013). Regarding the first, Morell and Brunet (1999) assured that the recruitment systems are not neutral, because they incite bias in candidates who seek to adapt to the requirements of the position, although in the same way they affirm, like Giacomelli (2009), that with the support of information technologies, the filtering of applicants is improved, which, in turn, is reflected in the decrease in staff turnover (Flores, Abreu, & Badii, 2008).

On the other hand, the concept of competences emerged from North American industrial and organizational psychology in the mid-1960s (Spencer *et al.*, Cited by Flores (2007)); however, until the mid-1990s, competencies were formally considered an educational model that integrated cognitive and behavioral processes: learning to know (combining knowledge of general culture), learning to do (ability to cope with various professional situations), learning to be (development of responsibility and autonomy) and learning to live together (understanding, interdependence and problem solving) (Delors, 1996), which translates into the knowledge (know), the methodological ways of proceeding at work (know-how), the guidelines and forms of individual and collective behavior (knowing how to be), and the forms of organization and interaction (knowing how to be) (López, 2010). Current trends define competence as aptitude and suitability; set of knowledge that gives authority to understand a certain subject. Refers to someone educated (Fierro Murga, 2010).

For Arias, Rosete, and Martínez (2006), a job competence is an individual characteristic necessary for a job activity to be performed effectively, also, Perrenoud (2004) defined it as the set of aptitudes, abilities, skills, knowledge and capabilities, which indicates the development of individuals within an organization or, according to García and Pérez (2012), a job competence is the competitiveness of candidates for a position, regardless of the area where they work. This suggests that training, knowledge, and even experience is not sufficient to determine the suitability of a candidate, and it is necessary to identify attitudes and values as well. The selection process consists of three basic phases (Arias *et al.*, 2006):

- Establishment of the job profile. As a first step, it is necessary to list all those competencies that the position requires, based on the work activities.
- Evaluation of the candidate. Through different tests, the qualities of the candidate are evaluated, in order to determine the levels of aptitude of a person in comparison with the tasks of the job.
- Adaptation of the candidate. In addition to personal characteristics, the qualities of the candidate must be compared with those established for the position, in order to establish whether or not they will adapt to the needs of the company.

If competencies are considered, they should be included in the job description, and the application of questionnaires and interviews should integrate this information. A traditional job description includes the obligations, tasks and responsibilities required to perform the job, while a job description based on competencies, integrates the competencies necessary to be successful in the job (López, 2010).

On the other hand, Rodríguez and Posadas (2007), proposed a classification of competencies, in such a way that the selection exercise is carried out in a multi or interdisciplinary way, encouraging the participation of various professionals. In Table 1 the competencies can be viewed and classified according to various criteria. It is possible to organize them by related definitions.

Table-1. Classification of competences (Rodríguez & Posadas, 2007).

Classification	Practices	Required competencies
Executive level (Vice President, Director, Deputy Director, Manager)	Directives	Solve problems Establish strategies Design plans Manage projects Create Products Predicting the economy Negotiate with suppliers
Criterion post (Assistant Manager, Boss, Supervisory Deputy Boss)		Organize staff Design presentations Submit writings Coordinate events
Qualified position (Salespeople, technicians, secretaries)	No directives	Carry out technical activities Drive production machines
Unskilled position (Assistant)		Perform manual activities Do routine activities

Similarly, Hooghiemstra, cited by Flores (2007), offered a general classification of job competencies, contemplating one of the three types of positions that he proposed: executives, directors and employees.

In Table 2, unlike those established by Rodríguez and Posadas, a classification is shown that only contemplates qualified positions, in other words, competencies required of those who are going to perform a certain task, which implies descending to higher levels of specificity.

The levels of responsibility mentioned in both tables coincide in the criteria of executive, chief-director and qualified employee-position.

Table-2. General competencies according to position held (Hooghiemstra, cited by Flores (2007)).

Position	Competencies
Executives	Strategic reasoning Change leadership Relationship management
Directors	Flexibility Introduction of the change Interpersonal sensitivity Delegation of responsibilities Teamwork Transferability to different geographical environments
Employees	Flexibility Motivation to seek information and ability to learn Achievement orientation Motivation to work under time pressure Collaboration in multidisciplinary groups Customer orientation

1.3. Assessment by Competencies

In Mexico, the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labor Competencies (CONOCER) is the main government body, which includes workers and entrepreneurs, to determine criteria for evaluating competencies and align the educational offer with the requirements of companies (OECD, 2019). At the same time, he mentions that the competency evaluation process demonstrates by means of evidence that the person has the knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviors to perform the function defined in a competency standard at a high level of performance, that is, a person is competent in the world of work when he puts his knowledge into practice to achieve the expected results.

Urdaneta, cited by Pereira, Gutiérrez, Sardi, and Villamil (2008), defined that the evaluation of competencies complements the selection system. Likewise, an evaluation by competencies consists in the assessment of an individual's performance, through judgments supported by evidence, according to criteria defined by the competency standards (González, Romero, Medina, & Behena, 2008).

1.4. Personnel Selection Techniques

Among the main techniques used for personal selection are the interview, the analysis of the curriculum and the psychometric tests, which can be applied through employment agencies or in the companies themselves. Thus, [Torrico \(2007\)](#), described them as follows:

- Analysis of the curriculum. It is the technique most used by companies, and consists of reviewing the background and personal information of the applicants, presented in a summarized way in a document. It is customary to make phone calls to verify references and relevant data.
- The interview. It is common to complement the analysis of the curriculum with an interview, which can be structured or unstructured, depending on the type of information that is intended to be obtained from the candidate. Based on interaction, this technique is intended to deepen the information presented in the curriculum.
- Psychometric tests. To apply this type of evaluation, it is necessary to have personnel trained in the handling and interpretation of the tests. In addition, the information obtained is focused on identifying the personality and interests of the applicant.

In general, the personnel selection activity is located in the human resources department, which has evolved since the Industrial Revolution, the Taylorist model, the theories of Elton Mayo, until the present time ([Pérez, 2014](#)). For his part, [Pérez \(2014\)](#) stated that, although there are manuals of good practices in recruitment and selection, they are often not followed: the search and evaluation processes are started without a prior study of the position to be filled, incomplete profiles are established, and demands not related to the performance of the work activity are included. In addition to this, the reduction in the importance given to human resources departments has led to a gradual de-professionalization and, consequently, the possibility of finding the candidate who best fits the characteristics of the vacancy has decreased.

Since selection is the prediction of human behavior, the techniques used will always carry some implicit bias ([Blasco, 2004](#)). As complementary elements to the selection techniques, the [Carrillo, Bravo, and Valenciana \(2014\)](#), defines the description and specification of the position, as follows:

- Job Description. The activities and goals pursued by the job are listed.
- Specification of the position. It defines the skills, characteristics and experience that the person chosen to do the job must have.

1.5. Validity of Personnel Selection Processes

For the human resources recruiter, personnel selection involves overcoming various challenges, among which are [Strucchi \(2001\)](#):

- Know personal aspects of the candidate, but at the same time take care not to invade his privacy.
- Respect your professional code of ethics, or in the case of psychometric tests, what is proposed by the American Psychological Association.
- Be able to apply techniques such as the psychometric test and the interview.

Personality measures began to be studied in the early 1990s, however, their predictability has not been clearly demonstrated ([Rothstein & Goffin, 2006](#)), to which [De Soete, Lievens, and Druart \(2013\)](#) add that, to despite the criterion validity of the measurement instruments, ethnic differences affect the outcome of the selection. In the case of psychometric tests, they sometimes include more desirable responses than others, influenced by what is socially accepted, and as with interviews, they are sensitive to pretend, that is, when the individual seeks to behave or say that behaves, in appearance, as society expects it to [Morgeson et al. \(2007\)](#). For this, it is advisable to determine the validity of the measurement instruments (psychometric test, survey, evaluation, etc.), which is established when what is intended to be measured, is measured: just as the temperature must be measured with a thermometer, and not a scale, personality, ability to solve problems or intelligence, for example, must be strictly measured with the appropriate scale ([Prieto & Delgado, 2010](#)).

Therefore, validity can be divided into two aspects: criterion validation, which represents the correlation between the test result and the scores required by the position, and content validation, which considers that the items to measure the criterion are a representative sample of the content to be evaluated.

Another measure that aims to ensure the validity of the instruments is the motivational distortion scale, which consists of adding items to reinforce or contradict some other of the same test and, based on these results, tolerable ranges are established to consider a set of responses as valid ([Strucchi, 2001](#)). Likewise, according to [Strucchi \(2001\)](#), reading and meticulous analysis of CVs is a strategy that can add certainty to the process, as well as simulation activities, in the manner of a Gesell camera. For his part, [Alonso \(2011\)](#) mentioned that structured interviews have shown, for more than a decade, that they predict job performance and success in the training of those selected, but, to ensure this validity, the interviewers need to be trained on the subject. In addition, the author points out the convenience of using this selection technique, since it is the instrument most used by companies and is even commonly the only evaluation resource necessary for decision-making. To this can be added the recommendation of [Fine \(2012\)](#), who insisted on the use of questionnaires that minimize the risk of potential harm, caused by counterproductive work behaviors, which, in other words, refers to problematic employees.

Despite the fact that there are researchers who assure that in the last 30 years the predictive validity of the instruments has been ensured (Alonso, Moscoso, & Cuadrado, 2015), other authors have suggested following other routes, and relying on theories that complement the selection techniques, for example, functional roles (Escobedo & Guerrero, 2017) and data mining (Chien & Chen, 2008).

1.6. Ethics in Personnel Selection

The reliability and scientific validity of personnel selection tools are necessary, but insufficient, requirements from an ethical point of view. Rodríguez, Navarrete Moraga, and Bargsted Aravena (2017) questioned the use of instruments and methodologies that are irrelevant or that invade people's privacy; misuse of information; inequality of employment opportunities; use of instruments whose prediction of job performance is scarce (Rorschach test, graphology, tests based on drawings, among others); discrimination against applicants based on their appearance, age, ideologies, leisure preferences and / or sexual orientation; falsification of the information offered by the candidates; conflicts related to the degree of admissible inquiry by recruiters and the unequal power relationship (excessive delays, ambiguous processes, intimidation).

According to Pulido-Martínez (2014), to act ethically, recruiters should not allow social prejudices to prevail and it is their professional obligation to prevent: recommended, family members, or people who occupy a privileged social position, from being chosen without merits to justify it.

Similarly, stereotypes are a factor that often impoverishes people's judgments in their behavior and, in this case, in their ability to select objectively. Stereotypes are defined as mental reproductions of reality on which it is generalized about members or objects of some group (Casas Martínez, 2008). In turn, Horcajo, Briñol, and Becerra (2009) demonstrated, experimentally, that it is not enough to want to be objective when evaluating another person, since they found evidence that the activation of stereotypes affects the perception of individuals.

The same effect applies to the stereotypes of the executive, the graduate, the operator, to name a few examples. This "bias" compromises the ethical and methodological sense of the hiring, speaking of impartiality and respect for the candidates.

That is, the perception of the candidates plays an important role in the ethical discussion of the recruitment processes, in particular, in the result. Osca and López-Araújo (2009) argued that candidates who are accepted, in general, have a more positive perception compared to those who were rejected, who tend to argue that the process was unfair. At this same point, Wiesenfeld, cited by Osca and López-Araújo (2009), stated that when the result is negative, the perception of the justice of the process is improved.

The study of the candidate's perceptions regarding the selection processes has shed light on various variables, such as anxiety towards tests (Gilliland, 1994). Regarding the other variables, Gilliland, cited by Osca and Salmones (2004), proposed the organizational justice model, which is in the procedural phase. Likewise, we can mention the model of Derous and De Witte, cited by Osca and Salmones (2004), which consists of eight factors, similar to those proposed by Gilliland:

- Provision of general information about the position.
- Participation and control of candidates.
- Openness to candidate's proposals.
- Transparency in the design of the tests.
- Feed-back contribution.
- Guarantee of objectivity in the selection.
- Guarantee of humane treatment.
- Respect for the privacy of the candidate and the information he provides.

If candidates perceive that they are fairly evaluated and given feedback, their self-esteem and motivation towards the process will increase. Likewise, Bernerth, Feild, Giles, and Cole (2006) found that the personality of the participants is associated with the perception of fairness in the process.

2. Method

The research is qualitative, theoretical, descriptive in scope and in a bibliographic and / or documentary way, so that the compilation and analysis of texts is used as a technique to discuss the literature on the subject of study.

3. Discussion and Theoretical Development

3.1. Social Representations, another Theoretical-Methodological Possibility

The individual perception of recruiters does not emerge one-dimensional, it is multi, inter, and cross-dimensional. Like stereotypes, social representations, defined by different cultural, economic, historical and geographical constructions, respond to diverse contexts; they are intimately linked not to the epistemic arguments of the sciences and their statistical techniques, but to the phenomenological tradition.

Social representations allow us to understand social relations, knowledge or knowledge generated by the relationships established in inter and multicultural processes, as well as previous "prejudices" and "ideas", in

short, allow us to delve into the elements of identity that they manifest themselves objectively and subjectively in the cultural elements of individuals, between classes and social groups of different contexts (geographical and historical). From the above, it is understood that it is through social representations that intercultural communication is established, an issue that is fundamental in the understanding of multicultural relationships, which come to have an important role in xenophobic, homophobic, racist attitudes, of extreme intolerance to the different; that are learned-taught in specific contexts and languages, therefore, in the construction of social representations, the historical dimension is revealed, because representations can be of long duration, such as those referring to deserts or droughts that have Judeo-Christian origins (Mancera-Valencia, 2009).

Farr (1994) suggested a double function of Social Representations: the process of turning the strange into something familiar, and making the invisible, perceptible. Thus, individuals create symbolic categories in order to name the unnameable, and define what has not been described through words, what (Banchs, 2001) defined as the epistemology of common sense, whose interest is the study of meaning and the construction of signs and symbols of language, through interaction. For his part, León (2002) mentions of a symbolization by which subjects establish relationships with objects, to represent them in their minds.

According to Banchs (2001), Social Representations are an approach and a theory at the same time, because, for their study, they involve a set of methods and techniques to obtain and analyze information. They are called structural, under a quantitative approach that makes use of the experimental method and techniques such as correlational and multivariate analysis, which allow identifying how representations are formed, while explaining their core and the functions, dimensions and elements of the cognitive structure. In short, the structural approach is found under the positivist meta-paradigm, with the objectives of corroborating, confirming, measuring and classifying. On the other side, according to Banchs, is the processual approach, which refers to the qualitative, hermeneutical approach, focused on diversity and on the significant aspects of representative activity (Banch, 2000). This approach understands the human being as a producer of meanings, symbols, and meanings of language, thus indicating a socio-constructionist meta-paradigm, which perceives and describes changing meanings.

On the other hand, social representations have the following functions (Abric, 2001):

1. Functions of knowing, which allow understanding and explaining reality from the acquisition of knowledge that is integrated into a frame of reference understandable to individuals and responds to the values already internalized by them and make communication possible.
2. Identity functions that define identity and safeguard the specificity of groups. They place individuals with their own and rewarding social identity that gives them a primary place in the processes of social comparison and control.
3. Guidance functions that are constituted as potential guides of behaviors and practices.
4. Justification functions have a central character since they allow to explain, justify or legitimize the position taking and behaviors.

For his part, Serge Moscovici, founding theorist of social representations, identified two implicit processes of "objectification" of social representations and how this objectification is transformed into moving from a social object to a representation object, and how this representation changes with the social. Thus, the first process is the objectification that is related to "making the abstract concrete" (Abric, 2001).

Objectification is the procedure by which the subject selects words and objects to decontextualize them from their original situation, adapting each word to an object that allows knowledge and sharing it with others through communication in other contexts, "concretely materialize meanings". This process comprises three moments: 1) the selection of the information; 2) the formation of a scheme or structure from the elements of the information acquired to precisely form a conceptual structure and 3) the materialization that generates the image and gives meaning to the initial abstract ideas of the information (Abric, 2001).

The second process in social representation is anchoring, that is the social roots of the representation and its object. Anchoring articulates three of the basic functions of social representation: 1) the cognitive function of the integration of the object, 2) the function of interpretation of reality and 3) the function of orientation of behaviors and social relations. The concretion or practicality of the representation is established based on a figurative nucleus, the system of interpretation of reality and the orientation of behaviors. When reality becomes understandable and is translated into practical and useful or functional knowledge, social knowledge allows the subject to function in the network of relationships and diverse environments of his everyday life (Abric, 2001).

4. Conclusions

Recruitment and selection of personnel is a dynamic issue that has always accompanied companies in their development and has benefited from the evolution of information technologies. However, subjectivity - perceptions and beliefs, which influence and are influenced by the interests and desires of the subjects-, prevails, despite the efforts made to give certainty and explanation, to the recruitment and selection results (tests of reliability and validity of instruments, assessment by competencies, psychometric tests, among others). As with science, there is a discourse that measures, calculates and foresees, and another that seeks to understand what is perceived, builds and rebuilds its own identity. Therefore, a crisis in the ethics of the construction of knowledge of reality is evidenced, since there is no epistemological congruence, nor is it ethical

to evaluate subjectivities with techniques that seek to objectively explain reality; this requires procedures and the use of phenomenological traditions that allow us to understand the subjectivities that are put into play. The foregoing seeks to generate discussion around two apparently contrary paths that, however, converge in all human activities and must be seen as a *sine qua non* condition. In particular, the literature review suggests that it is essential to support the selection processes in the techniques developed for this purpose, but it should not be forgotten how valuable social representations and subjectivities can be; how relevant a life story is; how dangerous a stereotype is; how inevitable human bias is, and how relevant is understanding the needs of businesses and workers.

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